

Withdrawal Pt. 3 – Matthew 18:15-17 – Withdrawing From Offenders

INTRODUCTION:

1. Today I want to conclude our present study of withdrawal, or how we must not associate with sinful and impenitent brethren, and what that means to us as a congregation and as individual Christians.
 - A. We need to study this subject because people have misconceptions about this that can easily *muddy the waters* and *cause division* within a congregation of the Lord when this must be done.
 - B. So, since we have as our goal in Christ is to strive to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), lessons of this type are needed to insure unity when faced with difficulty.
2. Today I want to focus mainly on Matthew 18:15-17 and its teaching, though we will examine three other scriptures, in hopes of coming to a better understanding of God’s desires in this area and to dispel certain misconceptions people have about this subject.

BODY:

- **I. Personal offenses (Matthew 18:15-17 – “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”):**
 - A. Problem/Offense (18:15 – “your brother sins [against you]”).
 1. Given your translation and the weight it places to the various Greek texts, your Bible may read “If your brother sins” or “If your brother sins **against you.**”
 - a. This question concerning the proper reading does not alter the teaching of the passage, however, due to further information provided in the text.
 - b. For, we know this involves a **personal, private sin against an individual** because...
 - i. This sin can be addressed in private without anyone else knowing.
 - ii. The offending brother can be gained/restored privately, and the matter settled and ended, without the involvement/knowledge of anyone else, which could not be so if this was a public sin bringing reproach on the local church and its members.
 - c. The problem here concerns a Christian personally sinning against another Christian.
 - **B. Procedure (18:15b-17a):**
 - 1. Because this is a personal, private, matter, the procedure begins with **individual, personal, care and responsibility** to restore one’s fellow Christian (18:15b – “**go and show him his fault in private.**”).
 - a. To **show** them their fault means to **admonish, convict, reprove** the offender concerning their fault.
 - b. **Goal:** To get your brother to **listen** to you that they might **repent** and you **win your brother**, or that he/she might be **restored, or reconciled.**
 - 2. But, if he refuses to listen and the matter cannot be resolved individually and privately, **small group**, or semi-private, action is required.
 - a. The one offended must take one or two more with them.
 - b. **Goal:** The witnesses are to help **confirm/determine the facts** in hopes the offender will **listen**, or accept, their reproof and **repent** and be **reconciled.**
 - 3. But if the offender refuses to listen to them, the matter is to be brought to the attention of the **local church.**
 - a. **Goal:** Even this is not yet for public disciplinary action, but that he might **listen to the church** (not just the leadership) as it reprovess and persuades the offender to repent.
 - b. Why involve the church? Because the local church is the highest level of persuasion, and eventual judgement, concerning Christians on earth (1 Cor. 6:1-8).
 - i. Once the church has the facts (helped by the witnesses), judgement is made, requiring the **members** to go and seek repentance from the sinner.
 - ii. Though difficult, this needed to show true love for the sinner and their salvation.
 - c. If the offender refuses to listen to the local church, punishment must follow.

- C. Punishment (18:17b – “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”).
 1. This verse says nothing about **excommunication** by the church, but prescribes the attitude you must then take toward the impenitent offender.
 - a. Some might argue this attitude toward the *offender* is only *required* of the one who was *offended*, the *you* (18:15) who was sinned against.
 - b. This view, however, ignores the fact that the **whole church** now knows the sin and the impenitent, ungodly attitude of the offender, which cannot be tolerated by the faithful.
 - c. The **offender** must be treated **by all** like a **Gentile** and a **tax collector**, meaning we must keep our distance, avoiding social interaction with them (see 2 Thess. 3; 1 Cor. 5).
 2. In all this it should be noted that the Lord has left to our judgment how long this process of warning and exhortation is to go.
- 3. Of course, if the initial admonitions or the withdrawal brings repentance, we are to receive the offender back (2 Cor. 2:6-8 – “Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, ⁷ so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”).
- • D. Prominent misconception: Many believe Matthew 18:15-17 is **the rule** for dealing with **all sin** that might ultimately result in withdrawal.
 1. People claim:
 - a. No matter the sin or circumstances, all efforts must begin with a single individual acting privately, followed by two or three, followed by the efforts of the local church, followed by withdrawal.
 - b. They are not bound by the decision to withdraw because “it was not done right,” meaning the church did not follow the procedure of Matt. 18:15-17.
 - 2. This is a **misconception** because:
 - a. Some sins are **known publicly** and do not fit Jesus’ scenario of a sin that can be settled and ended **privately** (18:15; 1 Cor. 5:1-2 – “It is actually **reported** that there is immorality **among you**, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. ² **You have become arrogant** and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would **be removed from your midst**.”). The church knew about this sin and had reacted, howbeit wrongly, toward it.
 - b. Paul’s instructions concerning dealing with a public sin are very different than what Jesus commanded in Matthew 18:15-17 (1 Cor. 5:3-5 – “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ **When you are assembled** in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to **deliver this man to Satan** for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”).
 - c. So, Matt. 18:15-17 is **not the rule** for dealing with all sin.
- II. Three Scriptures of interest:
 - A. **Romans 16:17-18** – “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause **dissensions** and **hindrances** contrary to the teaching which you learned, and **turn away from them**. ¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.”
 - 1. Problem/Offense: Some causing **dissensions** (disunion, division) and **hindrances** (offenses [scandal] contrary to Gospel teaching, being a stumbling-block, or to entrap or draw another into sin) and **deceiving** (deluding, beguiling) the unsuspecting.
 - 2. Punishment:
 - a. **Keep an eye on** them (look out for, notice, keep one’s eyes on – **BDAG**), **mark them**.
 - b. **Turn away from them** (avoid, turn away from, to turn aside – **BDAG**; keep aloof from...to shun – **Thayer**) as we have seen in the previous two lessons.

- c. Why? Because they serve themselves and their desires, rather than Christ, and deceive the unsuspecting, the weak, and are, therefore, a sinful threat.
- B. **2 Timothy 3:1-5** – “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.”
 - 1. Problem: There are **many sins** listed, many of which in this context might surprise us (i.e., lovers of money, boastful, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, gossiping, conceit, etc.).
 - 2. Punishment: **Avoid**, turn away from, shun, such **people as these!**
- C. **Titus 3:10-11** – “Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹ knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”
 - 1. Problem: Being **factious**, one who creates or fosters **factions/division** by his unscriptural, or false, views or actions.
 - a. This is not discussing someone who simply has a differing view, one who through ignorance due to immaturity in the faith, or previous false teaching, has not come to the knowledge of the truth, though he/she desires the truth.
 - b. This is one who is not seeking unity, but who seeks to further his own beliefs and/or agenda within the congregation resulting in division.
 - 2. Procedure: **Warn**, admonish, call attention to, or rebuke them **once** and then **again** concerning their doctrine or actions and the consequences. If they refuse to repent...
 - 3. Punishment: **Reject**, decline, shun, refuse, or avoid them. Why?
 - a. Because that person’s continued desire to cause division and their refusal to repent show they have a perverted/subversive/twisted mind.
 - b. Because their actions condemn them, which all should see.
 - c. Because failure to take this action leaves the local church vulnerable to their influence and the division they seek to cause.

CONCLUSION:

1. As we conclude our study of this subject, I hope I have helped you:
 - A. Understand God’s will on this matter and to prepare you for if/when this action must be taken.
 - B. See the purpose of this action (Jas. 5:19-20 – “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”).
2. Let us:
 - A. Be careful to consider one another and stir up love and good works so that we may never have to face this here at Colonial Heights.
 - B. Realize that we all have responsibilities in this matter to assure that God’s plan works.
3. If you have not given your life to Jesus in faith, repentance, confession of your faith, and baptism, why will you continue to wait? Why will you ignore your need to respond to Jesus?
4. If you have fallen away from your faithfulness and salvation, and desire to return to Christ in humble penitence and confession of sin, why will you continue to delay your coming to Christ?
5. Come now as we sing!